

The Builder.

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THE architectural embellishment of a city is of much greater consequence in forming the character of the people than some hasty thinkers now-a-days recognize. The constant contemplation of fine forms, or the reverse, has a powerful effect upon the mind; and it should be the duty of governments to aid in obtaining for the multitudes the advantages of the former to the extent of their power.

Plato says, in one of his Dialogues, "The plan we have been laying down for the education of youth was known long ago to the Egyptians, that nothing but beautiful forms and fine music should be permitted to enter into the assemblies of young people."

In England, this has been little thought of; the people have been rigorously excluded from the contemplation of works of art, although the enjoyment of it would have cost the nation nothing; and many of our public buildings, instead of advancing the standard of taste, have tended to lower it. That an anxious desire exists at this moment to remedy the mistake as quickly as possible is certain. And this no one will doubt who has watched the proceedings in Parliament during the present session. Although it is unfortunately too much the custom of the daily press to omit reporting much of what is said in the House about art and monuments, it is obvious that these subjects have occupied more attention there than usual. In the debate as to whether the tax of 1d. per ton on coals should be continued, and the money devoted to the purpose of improving the town, all agreed in the necessity for metropolitan improvement, however much they differed as to the propriety of raising money by that particular tax.* The vote of money for the repair of St. Margaret's church, Westminster, led on another occasion to a long conversation on Gothic buildings and taste; and Mr. Hume's annual motion for opening St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, when brought forward on Monday night last, was received in a very different manner from what used to be the case, and led to a more satisfactory result.

When the vote for St. Margaret's was proposed, Mr. P. Borthwick objected, on the ground that the money hitherto granted had been expended in the worst possible taste. He thought the church ought to be pulled down and rebuilt, rather than to undergo the Georgian-Gothic alterations with which it was proposed to deface the building. He also objected to Westminster Abbey, as not fulfilling the purpose for which it was intended. It was neither a cathedral nor a place of public exhibition; but rather a cross between both. (Laughter.) The monuments were a disgrace to the age and to the edifice. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that archi-

tectural amateurs were quite insatiable in their demands for public money to be spent in carrying out their ideas. As to St. Margaret's church, as the House of Commons occupied it in some sort, it was but proper that some part of the public money should be appropriated to its expenses. If the church were pulled down, as wished by Mr. Borthwick, an expense of not less than 50,000*l.* would be incurred. Mr. Osborne wished to know what was the use of the commission having brought in a report that the church ought to be pulled down, if parliament were to be required to vote 1,200*l.* for repairs? He was satisfied if Government came forward boldly, and proposed a vote of 40,000*l.* for a new church, that it would not be disapproved of. Viscount Sandon said, he should regret to see 40,000*l.* granted for merely replacing the same church. It would be much better to expend the money in pulling down the two towers of Westminster Abbey, which were alike deficient in taste and architectural beauty. Mr. Sheil would ask hon. members if the Abbey was turned to as much account as it ought to be? (Hear, hear.) It was a noble building, and might be made much more available for religious worship. Let the House consider the immense difference between the use made of that church and the churches on the Continent. The congregation was crammed into a small space; but that portion of the edifice might be enlarged by the expenditure of a few hundred pounds, and sufficient accommodation would thus be afforded, in a most economical manner. He never beheld a more beautiful structure than that now erecting by Mr. Barry. When the building should be completed, and the new street constructed, St. Margaret's church would be a complete eyesore, although so much public money would have been laid out in improvements. Mr. Prothero was of opinion that St. Margaret's church was a very fair specimen of undecorated Gothic architecture (?). The only part of the Abbey which was concealed by the church was the ugly portion between the north entrance and Henry the Seventh's chapel; and St. Margaret's church was far more sightly. Mr. Escott felt somewhat alarmed at the tone of the right hon. baronet the Secretary of State for the Home Department, who evidently intended that St. Margaret's church should remain permanently. If they consented to vote hundreds of thousands every year for the new palace at Westminster, and could not afford 20,000*l.* or 30,000*l.* for the removal of that church, it would be better to put a stop to the improvements altogether. He considered the church to be a complete disgrace to the neighbourhood. The money for the repairs was, however, ultimately voted.

The terms of Mr. Hume's motion were;—"That in the opinion of this House, the practice of exacting fees from the public, as the condition of their admittance to cathedrals, is highly improper, and ought to be discontinued."—Sir R. Peel said he had always expressed his opinion that there was great public advantage in giving as free and unrestrained admission to those noble edifices as could be, consistently with securing those works of art which they contained. He could not conceive any thing that would exercise a better influence on the public mind than free admissions of the kind. At the same time he thought they should be subjected to one restriction,—namely, that precaution should be taken for the security of the monuments and other works of art erected in those edifices. Speaking generally, he believed nothing could be more ex-

emplary than the conduct of the great body of people when thus admitted. He spoke now of the working class, for their conduct had been quite as exemplary as that of persons in a higher condition of life. When a distinguished divine, the late Dean of Westminster, was appointed to another sacred office, he (Sir R. Peel) had an interview with him, and spoke to him on the subject, and he believed it was not only his wish but that of the whole chapter, to give the liberty of free admittance as far as was consistent with the security of the works of art. He was certain the present Bishop of Ely, in pursuance of the promise he had made, had given the fullest consideration to the subject, and that his exertions had been most constantly directed towards the object which the right hon. gentleman had in view. He (Sir R. Peel) had now the satisfaction of stating that, in consequence of a communication he had made to the present Dean of Westminster, Dr. Wilberforce, when he took the opportunity of stating to him the opinions he had expressed to Dr. Turtton, he mentioned how freely the public had been admitted to the exhibition of works of art, and how exemplary their conduct there had been; that there had been no instance of misconduct, and that they all retired with expressions of grateful acknowledgment for the opportunity that had been given them of inspecting those works, and that they felt an interest in them which it was most desirable to encourage; in consequence of that communication, he had, a few days since, received the following letter from the Very Reverend Dean of Westminster:—

"As I know your wishes respecting the admission of strangers, I trouble you with a few lines to say that I have just issued some new directions on that subject. Strangers are henceforth to be admitted into the south transept, the nave, and the north transept, that is, into the great body of the church. The only portion from which they will be excluded is from the choir, except at time of service, for obvious reasons, and the chapel behind the choir. These will be shewn to them at a charge of 6d. apiece, and this will be the only payment allowed in the abbey. Such a payment is universal on the continent."

"S. WILBERFORCE."

The admission then to the body of the abbey would be free, as was the practice in foreign countries; and if the parties visiting wished to see the choir and the chapel, he believed a small fee would be required.

On the occasion of taking the vote for 2,000*l.* towards the expense of statues of Hampden, Lord Falkland, and Lord Clarendon, the execution of which works is recommended by the Commissioners of Fine Arts to be given to William Calder Marshall, John Bell, and John Henry Foley, whose works in the last exhibition in Westminster Hall were considered by the commissioners to be entitled to special commendation,—Mr. Williams expressed a hope that when monuments were being built to commemorate the achievements of the former monarchs and rulers of this country, the claims of the Protector Cromwell would not be overlooked. Not one of those rulers had been more distinguished as a soldier and a statesman; and he was as much entitled to a monument to be raised by the people of this country as Napoleon was to one from the people of France. He hoped that Cromwell would not be denied a niche in the palace of Westminster.—Mr. Hunt believed that the protector would not be excluded. He had seen a list in which his claims to a niche were sub-

* In the course of the discussion on this measure in the House of Lords, the Marquis of Londonderry who has persistently opposed it, said, the tax would produce 300,000*l.* per annum. This tax, he said, did not fall on the consumer, but on the coal-owner. On the same occasion, the Marquis of Westminster called the attention of the Government to the way in which the communication from Oxford-street to Holborn had been carried out; the opening had been made so narrow, that he feared it would cause greater evil than that which it was intended to remedy.